

Caring for your Rabbit



Feeding

Feeding the correct diet is the most important aspect of rabbit care.

Commercial 'muesli' type diets can cause many problems and should be avoided. They encourage selective feeding which can cause problems:

Soft Bones from lack of calcium. This can lead to overgrown teeth and tooth roots which produce abscesses causing weeping eyes, and spine or limb fractures and / or back pain.

Tooth disease due to lack of calcium and reduced wear on the teeth from the low fibre content

Digestive problems The rabbit's digestive system is designed for low nutrient fibre. The high sugar and low fibre content in these diets can lead to life-threatening gut stasis, and caecotroph (the soft faeces which rabbits should eat) accumulation around the anus. This can attract flies in summer leading to infection and lead to life-threatening fly-strike

Obesity Overweight rabbits cannot clean themselves properly and the build-up of caecotrophs around their tail attracts flies. These lay eggs on your rabbit which hatch into maggots. This is known as '**Flystrike**' and requires prompt veterinary treatment. 'Rear Guard' may help prevent future occurrences until your rabbit loses weight.

Always consult a vet if your rabbit appears to have diarrhoea or a permanently dirty rear end.

What should I feed my rabbit?

Grass & Hay contain all the necessary nutrients for rabbit health. They also provide fibre to aid digestion. As in the wild, your rabbit will need to eat a lot to satisfy its energy requirements. This increased chewing results in healthier teeth and reduces boredom in pet rabbits. A rabbit should eat about its body size in hay or grass each day. **Greens** such as **Cabbage, Broccoli, Dandelions, Docks, Spring greens, Carrot tops (the green leafy part), Celery, and Herbs** provide variety in the diet. A handful should be fed each day.

Spinach & Kale may be fed in moderation but not every day as they may cause bladder stones. Other occasional treats are **Green Peppers, Dark green salad leaves, Tomatoes and Apples.**

Avoid carrots, peas, beans and sweetcorn due to their high starch content and treats such as biscuits, bread or toast, treat sticks, sugary foods, chocolate drops and nuts for the same reason.

Pelleted food is appropriate as a supplement feed especially for growing, breeding or thin rabbits. We recommend Burgess 'Supa Rabbit Excel'. It is in pellet form which ensures your rabbit cannot pick and choose and gives you confidence that a balanced diet is being provided. A tablespoon per day is enough for an average-sized rabbit.

Weight Loss and Changing to a healthy diet

Rabbits need to eat frequently and starving them can upset their health. Changing to a healthy diet of mostly hay will help them lose weight gradually. Gradually reduce the dry food over a couple of weeks and introduce some greens.

Some rabbits are not keen to eat a different food or may get mild stomach upsets. By introducing new foods slowly, you can identify any that cause a problem.

Allow your rabbit plenty of exercise, at least 4 hours daily and the weight will come off naturally.

We provide FREE weight advice and weight check appointments for rabbits.

Vaccination

Myxomatosis

A disease common in wild rabbit populations locally. It is transmitted by bites from fleas and flying insects, being easily transferred between animals. The infection causes skin swellings, respiratory disease and is usually fatal.

This disease can affect house rabbits too, as your rabbit does not have to come into contact with other rabbits to be at risk.

Viral Haemorrhagic Disease (VHD)

A condition which causes rapid internal bleeding, convulsions and sudden death.

A combined vaccination against both diseases is recommended with a single injection from 5 weeks of age.

Boosters

To maintain immunity against these diseases we recommend an annual booster vaccination. This can be given with one injection. As part of our vaccination programme we will send you an annual reminder when your rabbit is due for a booster.

We complete a full health check at each visit and provide FREE advice on all aspects of rabbit care.

Housing

Rabbits need lots of space to allow adequate exercise for muscle and bone health. It also makes them less nervous and consequently less likely to become aggressive. They are quite tolerant to cold as long as they have a dry sheltered environment and plenty of warm bedding material, such as hay and straw.

Waste should be disposed of regularly as the fumes from soiled bedding can encourage rabbits to develop pneumonia.

Sunlight is important as it promotes Vitamin D production which helps to maintain a correct calcium balance. However, shade must be easily available to prevent overheating.

'House' Rabbits

House rabbits are becoming increasingly popular. Rabbits adapt well to being kept indoors as they are extremely social pets and can be easily trained to use a litter tray. Care must be taken to combat destructive chewing behaviour. Rabbit-proofing furniture and electric cables before introducing a rabbit is advisable!

Keeping Rabbits Together

Rabbits live in small groups in the wild, so pet rabbits can become lonely and bored if kept alone. Rabbits are generally happy together provided they have plenty of space. Care should be taken when introducing a new rabbit to a group or individual. Rabbits are more likely to get along well if they have been neutered as it reduces aggressive mating behaviour as well as preventing unwanted litters.

Rabbits and Guinea Pigs

It is not generally recommended to house guinea pigs with rabbits, as the two species have very different nutritional requirements. Rabbits can inflict severe injuries on guinea pigs, and can make them very unhappy through bullying.

Neutering

Neutering of rabbits is recommended to reduce aggression, urine marking, and mating behaviour.

In female rabbits, spaying will prevent uterine cancer and uterine infections later in life, as well as unwanted litters.

We recommend spaying female rabbits at 5-6 months of age.

Male rabbits are castrated routinely at 4-5 months of age, or when the testes are of a reasonable size.

Insurance

It is possible to insure your pet rabbit for veterinary treatment in the same way as you would a dog or cat. When rabbits are unwell they often require a lot of treatment to get them better again so insurance can help provide peace of mind.

For more information
Please contact your Avonvale Vet

Avonvale

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